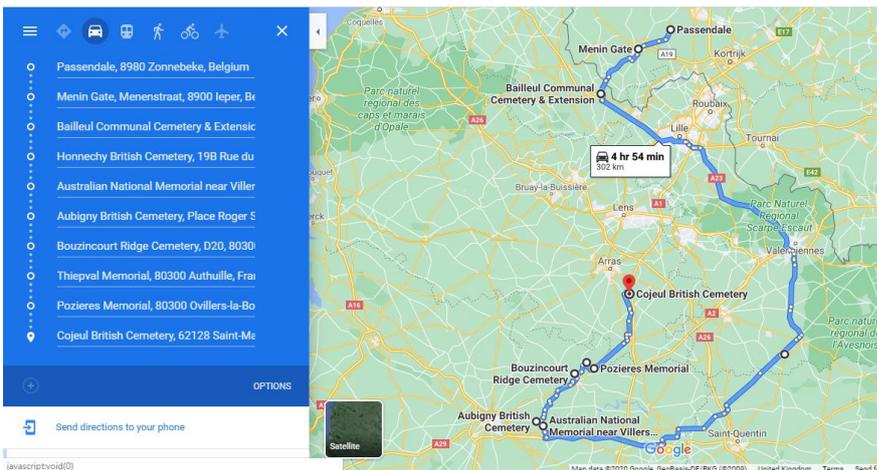


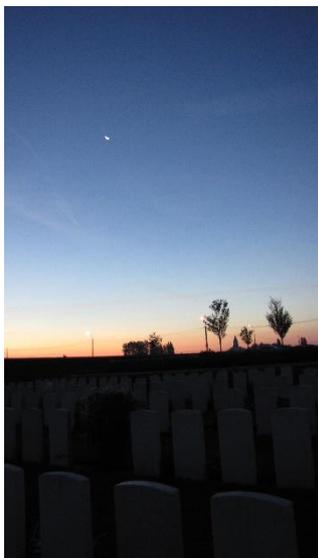
THE IDEA: To visit and leave a poppy cross at the grave or memorial of all the men named on the war memorials in the United Benefice of Cookley, Heveningham with Ubbeston and Huntingfield to commemorate the centenary of the end of the First World War. Trip funded by Cookley Church and the Heveningham Hall Trust, Poppy crosses donated by Alan Walpole.

THE PLAN: After researching our men on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website and finding that Lance-Corporals Harry Parker of Huntingfield and William Moore of Ubbeston are commemorated on the memorials in Helles, Turkey and Peshawar, India I realised that I would have to leave their visits to a future trip. This left me with 15 graves to find and visit. I also planned to visit the graves of two men not commemorated on our local memorials but who had family connections to the area; these being Pte. Christopher Gagen, Great-Uncle to David and Jeremy Blackmore and Sally Rothead and Pte. Stanley Bolam, listed as A Peavot as he stole his cousins birth certificate to enlist underage, Uncle to Sheila Clifford of Vicarage Farm, Linstead. So, 17 graves to visit in one weekend. After further research, and finding that some cemeteries or memorials held more than one of our men, I had 14 places to visit. These were:

- Passchendaele – Pte. Foster
- The Menin Gate – Ptes. Girling, B Mower and Rackham
- Bailleul Communal Cemetery – Ptes. S Mower and Bolam
- Honnechy British Cemetery – Pte. Nunn
- The Australian Memorial at Villers-Brettoneux – Pte. Oakley
- Aubigny British Cemetery – Pte. Gagen
- Bouzincourt Ridge Cemetery – Pte. Leathers
- The Theipval Memorial – L-Cpl Ransby
- Pozieres Cemetery – Pte. Green
- Cojeul British Cemetery – Pte. Page
- The Arras Memorial – Able Seaman Minter
- Duisans British Cemetery – Driver Keeble



My route for Saturday 7th October 2018. Starting at Passchendaele at dawn and ending at a motel in Arras, with 10 memorial sites visited. This left the Arras Memorial and Duisans British Cemetery in France to visit on Sunday 8th October, and then London City Cemetery and Walpole St Mary's on the way home.



THE TRIP: I had booked a 5am Tunnel crossing but arrived early so was put on the 3am train. With the time difference I was now in northern France at 4.30am and dawn wasn't til 6.20am. I had an hours sleep at a petrol station on the way to Passchendaele and arrived at 5.50am.



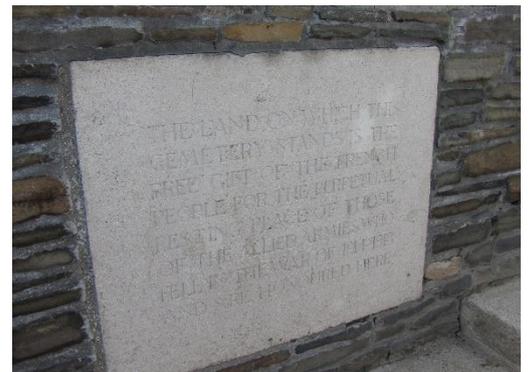
Passchendaele as the sun rose over the cemetery. Photo taken from next to the grave of Waldron Foster.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission provides details of the section of cemetery, row and number of each grave which made finding most of our men relatively simple. For each gravestone I placed the poppy cross with the mans name on against the stone. For those commemorated on large memorials, the CWGC provided a panel number where the name of the individual can be found. These are usually listed by regiment, then rank, then alphabetically by surname. Two of our men, George Albert Girling and Bertie Mower, are listed on adjacent panels of the Menin Gate at Ypres. I placed their crosses at the base of the respective panel. Russell Rackham is commemorated on another panel further along the arch.



Bailleul Communal Cemetery and Extension was easy to find but this was where I had the most difficulty finding the graves I was looking for. The cemetery was a mixture of war graves and town

cemetery and the CWGC directions weren't very accurate as there were less rows and less graves in a row than they indicated! I eventually found both Sidney Mower and Stanley Bolam and left the cross for Sidney and a posy of flowers from Vicarage Farm for Stanley.



From Bailleul I drove to Honnechy to find the grave of James Nunn. This was the most remote of the memorials that I visited and is on the edge of the village. It is a fairly small cemetery with only 4 rows of gravestones. It was incredibly peaceful as it is not near any of the more frequently visited big cemeteries or memorials. Somewhere in each cemetery there is a visitors book available to sign and indicate which grave is being visited; I didn't find them all but the ones I found I left the message 'Remembering {our soldier} with gratitude from the people of {his village}'.

From one of the smallest cemeteries my next stop was at one of the largest. The Australian Memorial at Villers-Brettonneux to find the memorial to Thomas Oakley of Heveningham, who served with the Australian Imperial Force.



The next few cemeteries and memorials were only a few miles apart; the sheer number of graves and names in such a small area is staggering. Just a few miles from Villers-Brettoneux is the village of Aubigny. I have been here before to visit the grave of my Great-Great-Uncle Chris Gagen. The cemetery is immaculately kept as are all I visited. It is opposite a field which had cattle grazing which seemed appropriate for a farm boy. Chris served in the Australian Imperial Force after emigrating as a £10 Pom. For those who remember my grandma Daphne, Chris was her father's brother.

My next stop was at Bazincourt Ridge Cemetery. This is another one that isn't the easiest to find as you have to drive up a small track to the ridge of the hill, it is a very windswept spot but you can see for miles.



The Cemetery Register, which holds details of all buried in the cemetery as well as the visitors book.



The Grave of Albert Leathers of Cookley at Bazincourt Ridge.

From Bazincourt Ridge it is particularly important to not follow the directions given by Google maps to the Thiepval Memorial as this brings you through some private land/field tracks to the back entrance to Thiepval... Luckily, the CWGC staff are quite understanding!

The Memorial Arch at Thiepval bears the names of over 72,000 men. Amongst them is John Ransby of Heveningham. All of the light coloured stone is covered in lists of names. I put John's cross as near to the panel his name is on as I could reach.



From John Ransby at Thiepval it isn't far to find another Heveningham man, William Green, commemorated on the memorial at Pozieres. His name is right at the top of the column in the photo. →



My last stop on the Saturday was to the small town of Cojeul, not far from Arras. Cojeul British Cemetery is the last resting place of James Page of Huntingfield. James has a memorial by the wall of the graveyard as he is one of the Unknown Soldiers in this cemetery. James is in one of the plots whose headstone reads **"A soldier of the Great War, Known To God"**.



DAY 2: Wet. First stop the Arras Memorial; this is having renovation work done but was still accessible if you slide the fence panel across slightly... Anyway... I found Arthur Minter halfway up a panel down an only-very-slightly shut off corridor. The Arras memorial is the main memorial to the Royal Flying Corps (forerunners, or possibly forefliers, of the RAF)



A lovely memorial from Snettisham Primary school for one of their soldiers; I would love to take some similar stones for ours next time I visit.

← My last stop in France was at Duisans British Cemetery. There appears to have been some confusion as Driver Keeble appears on both Cookley and Huntingfield War Memorials; possibly as his parents lived in Huntingfield while he, his wife and children lived in Cookley. His headstone reads **"Goodbye Daddy, from Frank, Cora, Gladys and Gordon"**.

Two of our commemorated men came home injured and then died of their wounds so are commemorated on War Memorials in England. These are: L-Cpl Woods of Ubbeston and Pte. Dunnett of Cookley



← Ernest Woods at the London City Cemetery

Alan Dunnett → in Walpole St Mary's

